

CIRCUITS

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ABSTRACT

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This is a collection of poems which consists of three sections. The first two are serial poems, while the final section is made up of individual, unrelated lyrics. "From the Temple" is made up of 15 short, random "bursts" from the interior monologue of a single character in a situation of extreme stress - he is being held a prisoner or hostage. "Bell Fragments" attempts, at greater length, to use the telephone and its inventor as both meditative object and symbol of the motivations, fears, interferences and lost connections that characterize human efforts to communicate. Several voices take part, including Bell's. In this long poem, the narrative remnant and the lyric constantly struggle with each other for supremacy. Each of these serial poems could most aptly be termed a series of fragments around a theme. I have attempted, however, to make each fragment able to stand, more or less, on its own, as do the individual lyrics of the final section, "Blue Hand Poems."

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Matrix: "Thesis Proposal"

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INTRODUCTION

A Note on my Use of the Serial Poem

You have to go into a serial poem not knowing what the hell you are doing. You have to be tricked into it, it has to be some path that you've never seen on a map before....It has to be renewed language and information that becomes a kind of map....The serial poem is often like a series of rooms where the lights go on and off. It is also a sequence of energies which burn out, and it may, by the path it takes, include the constellated. There is a further special analogy with serial music: the voice or tongue, the tone, of the poem sounds individually...but sounded in series, it enters a field.

Robin Blaser
"The Practice of Outside"
in The Collected Books of
Jack Spicer

The poetic sequence, usually fragmented and logically discontinuous in form, seems ideally suited to an exploration of our complex and multi-faceted world, in which concepts of self, matter and meaning have been exploded. The sequence also permits the poet to sustain his meditation on an idea or feeling or place over many pages, rather than wringing a limited statement or significance out of his materials for the sake of the solitary lyric. The explosive impulse permits not only breadth of treatment, but also moments of exceptional

lyric intensity.

In "From the Temple" and "Bell Fragments" I have chosen to work with a particularly modern form of the poem sequence - the serial poem. The serial poem exhibits a higher degree of logical discontinuity (and from this arises a greater degree of fragmentation) - direct connectives between individual poems are either not present or not apparent. In the two serial poems here, connection is at times maintained solely through a certain continuity of context, metaphor, or associated imagery.

I found this form (the product, one might theorize, of the evolution of poem cycle into poem sequence into seriality) most suitable for dealing with the concerns that express themselves in the two long sections. In the first section I chose to limit myself to one character/one voice. The individual poems are selected "bursts" or "releases" from an interior monologue of someone under extreme stress due to his being held prisoner, and his feeling of being a prisoner conceptually. The ambiguity level is intentionally high, and the form suited to the context. It is as if the character/voice is only able to send out sporadic releases, which portray different moments in the continuing monologue.

In the second section, the "Bell Fragments," the logical discontinuity and fragmentation are more pronounced due both to its length and to the number of voices which take part. This set of poems, too, could be considered a series of individual pieces around a theme; this one involving the phone as metaphor for the difficulties, fears, successes, breakdowns, interferences and lost connections that characterize human efforts to communicate. There is a constant struggle throughout the sequence between the lyric/serio-comic and the increasingly intermittent surfacing of the narrative remnant/dramatic. An elegaic tone is introduced in the presentations of Bell as revenant. The push is constantly toward narrative and the rebound is toward lyricism. Though I would normally eschew the term, what I have tried to present here is a good "post-modern" mix. A grave risk taken on by the choice of the phone as central image and object of meditation (and symbol) is that the phone is image-poor while rich in rhetoric. It is, after all, a talking machine, and here in this sequence, certainly a compositional trickster figure in addition to its role as such within the context of the sequence. The spirit of McLuhan's theories, never quite having directly surfaced in the sequence, can never quite

be laid to rest. Pooshoo's canoes are still afloat somewhere, and the final vision, despite the phone's being a poor product, is of an almost traditional pastoral paradise.

My one over-riding principle throughout each serial poem has been to make (with greater or lesser success) each one of the individual poems able to stand alone, while still doing its part to imply and "stand for" the much larger whole standing behind and hovering over them. To achieve this whole is the gamble.

FROM THE TEMPLE

"Isolation may be the beginning
of terror; it certainly is its
most fertile ground; it always
is its result."

Hannah Arendt
Totalitarianism

Pound

someone's in the counting house
rolling up dough
I am in the tiger's cage
watching how it goes

Locus

I should be
somewhere abstract
like the gold reserve
or godhead

not here
not with you my friends
fellow warm and pliable creatures
holding me tightfisted
body collateral
against your idea

a poor translation
of Marx not worth
the paper
it's written on.

the Gospels stand
in a strange relation
to truth

The Press

locked
in the reporter's notebook
captive of attention

face a state
meant - free
we are no story
but
together in this place
we form a pyramid
a structure
inverted & balanced
on the point
of his pen

today we are a group
subject
to exigencies
squeezed together
between ads

a concern measured
in column inches

one stroke of the pen
& we are erased,
headed
to the morgue

Memo to the Board

you govern me -
I admit it
with the urgency of breathing
& my body
is riddled with politics,
even that pocket
of recidivism
where the soul is stuffed
like lint.

You rough beasts crouch
in the vault of heaven
lined with scripts
testifying
to absent gold.

I cannot help being carried away
& I admire your exact knowledge
of where you think you are.
My skin is caught up
with your skin,
my value to you
is statistical.
I am penned in
& I know the reporters
define your position
economically.

They have not seen the light
behind your eyes,
nor this fragile,
benevolent terror
you impregnate me with.
We are a system of bonds
in a universe
that is setting
like Jello.

Someone else's dessert.

The First Mercantile

money
a shotgun shoved
into the soft
below the ribs
as blood ticks
through a finger
it swims
through the body
the shell
filled with coin

money the issue
of wedded finger
to a trigger somewhere
below the ribs

the shotgun
yawns & after
the shell is spent

I lie
on the floor
my wallet
will never master me
again

money is
after all else
a rent
of the flesh
that somewhere
in the pouring out
I realize
I owe nothing
to disposition

The Sanctity of Arms

I am your witness:

your idea invades
stabs its flag
into the cortex;
synaptic helicopters
assure quick occupation.
The arsenal of words,
taken by force,
undercuts the idea of resistance.
Skirmishes flare
in the outback
only to be extinguished.

Within days
my new forged state
is in command
of its voice.

Fluctuations
in the internal economy
impossible to interpret.

I notice a concurrent
sleep disturbance.

New coin, old realm.

St. Anselm Trust & Finance Co.

arguments grenades
pitched among prisoners.
They explode at intervals &
my heart is soon lined
with shrapnel.

I am a raw scrap
of emotion, so much meat
to you.

You sharpen.
my point of view,
jab it
into an eye.

There is no pain
like my pain.

I am convinced of that.

Mortal vs Venal Sins

not an actor
maybe a place-holder
a unit
breathing someone
else's air
until they breathe it
again

SUCKED THROUGH SPACE - SCIENTISTS BELIEVE THEY HAVE
DISCOVERED A HUGE GROUP OF GALAXIES THAT IS SUCKING
IN EARTH'S MILKY WAY

my mother warned me -
power is a relative
in high places

I wish I had more distance
or the Big Picture -
a chance to stand elsewhere
and see where I am.
This is no drama,
no catharsis
no time of coming together
and shared humanity,
no tender intimacies
between strangers.
This is a time of closing in,
fluctuating values

A prelude to digestion:
swallow pride.

Lachrimae Christi

I want your weapons
now -
so diverse, differing
only in size & shape, dark
& threatening to spurt
death into me.

I can hear the bullets
tumbling
in your chambers
perfectly encoded
with purpose - give birth
to death, make it real.

Oh god - his gun
was barely
touching my lips
& I felt
like coming
closer to it
swallow the silence
at the end
of his barrel.

Enough for everyone - six
guns, short
stubby & ambivalently
masculine
or thin
& full of grace
a dancer's leg. Oh, god
it gets to me
the trigger fingers
sharp staccato bursts
wordless instructions

I close my eyes
taste the salty
stream of bullets
entering
my open mouth -
a gusher on my tongue
as the hard seed
pierces the chambered
brain

Heated Conversion Chambers

thoughts contained
by bony prison
as food is constrained
to the timed walk
through the gut.
The pacing
determined
by authorities.
The release timed
and graded
as to health of the body
and benefit to society.

But
let me warn you:

if I die here
my brain has been programmed
to swell
and explode.
My notebook will fly
into the crowded room
slitting your throats
with the efficiency
of paper.

My wallet sneak home
with one of you &
smother you
sleeping.

I crave
verbal release
a fresh clip
of loaded phrases
fired in bursts

oh joyful holes -
fresh air
numbing the mind's
oubliette

The Baltimore Catechism: A Synopsis

money is solely
the metaphor
getting at one thing
but through another.

If only I could turn to you
say "the line groweth thick,"
and you were to understand.

As a prisoner
I see you abuse
your own word:

true translation
corporately impossible
settling for
visible signs:

this is my body
this my blood
the ceremony you propose
fully negotiable

my breathing is
an economic term

Outline: Safe in Church?

• Outside the cameras
squeeze off rounds

I hear
cannisters of film
drop into chemical tanks
launching the morning edition:

offset on tissue
thin & the colour
of dead skin,
a grainy shot
of my squeezed face
eyes open
like the sacristy
of my mouth
from the distance
the grenade against my throat
looks like any normal goiter
no sign of the knife
no smell of sweat
corroding my skin

the dots are black
my finger smears
into a smoky gray
as if the grenade
had gone off

the vault
is full
of breathing

Stigmata

damaged male
envelope ripped
spilled sound
a cry from the bombed station
round & round it goes

red meat moves fierce
in cave, shrieks
about here

slit open,
tongue balled
boiled words strung beads
on prayer-cord of pain

suck sound, blood
broken over dam of lip
damaged palate flaps at me
while crushed tongue
cleaves air

my dream hurts
an unfocussed
hurt

The Manichean Escapes

I was a ruler
walked straight & narrow
& believed a line
must be drawn
somewhere

but
I know now
my soft edges
fuzzy patches
in my thinking

no edge
no demarcation, only
the occupied zone
of my thoughts

the currency is words
nothing to bank on
though the doors lock
& the ideas are contradictory
data flows
through me like food

locked away
death flows in
through the wound
faster than life
pours out.

An imbalance
of payments

surrounded,
I switch sides
with each breath

End Peace

The way is
out. Train your eyes
left, centre, and right.
Pick up new vocabulary
frequently.
Avoid banks & churches
but if you must deal with them
do so
aware of the dangers
and of their history.
Sleep
as if there were a loaded gun
inside your head.
There is.

South America
bristles with priests
& branch plants.

BELL FRAGMENTS:
A Serial Meditation

"I am like a man in a fog
who is sure of his bearings."

Alexander Graham Bell
Bell: Alexander Graham Bell
and the Conquest of Solitude

Global Village Dream

1

I

dreamt

I was a native
of an obscure tribe in
New Guinea. No-one special,
whose name was Pooshoo. Pooshoo's
dreams, that is, my dreams, were of the reg-
ular sort, of lizards and bird-sprites that whispered
to me where to hunt, and big melons, as are only found
in New Guinea, hanging free, that I would sink my face
into. One day Pooshoo, that is, me, dreamt of a weird
little hut-thing, from which voices talked, though it
was much too small for the smallest child to sit in. The
next day, a god in the sky dropped it in my village.
Voices came out of it and it was, indeed, too small for
even a baby to be in. It was obviously a god. It exhib-
ited all the qualities of a god - mysterious origin,
unexpected arrival, & the power to speak in my dreams.

2

I dreamed that if I made others of these small gods and
gave each to others here, we would all have the same god.
That would be good, because then we would all know where
to hunt and what was the best time to make children,
because this god would help us all dream the same dream
and our village would grow and prosper and someday fill
up this whole valley, which was more or less the world.
It was hard for Pooshoo, that is, me, to bend my fingers
to make these gods. Yet I did so for the good of the
village. It was hard to make the rest of my village
accept the little gods. None of them had had my dream.
That is not strictly true, as there was one, my enemy in
the village, Mabou, ugly runt, kin to the lizard, who
dreamed my god was not the real god & who argued the god
who dropped my god was necessarily a greater god. This
caused some not to accept my god gift and to demand that
the real god return. I eased their anger by pointing out
that obviously the god who came to me was riding on his
vehicle, a big canoe, which drifted away when its god
passenger fell or jumped out, to come to me, whose
dreaming had called him, I suppose.

3

Some dreamed of the god when the little god thing I had made was in their hut. This helped make all want him for themselves. Soon everyone had one, and I expected good results. The trouble is, is that Mabou, pillar of warts, in an attempt to test my theory, which he chose to call the "drifting canoe theory," put one of my gods in a canoe and pushed it out to drift. It never came back and this seemed to bear out Mabou's contention. In the following days, the water was filled with canoes filled with my god gifts.

4

Many of us now dream the same dream, but it is of our many canoes floating with gods in them, voices talking to one another, out there somewhere. Unfortunately, these dreams come and go like the tide, and are usually, in my experience, of the voices talking as the gods float away, of how they are borne, and telling only each other where to hunt, and when to make babies.

5

I am often sad that it did not stop the dissension in the village. Last night my grandchild died, and I dreamed of him. He crawled into the hut-god too small for a child to sit in, and he heard voices coming from outside the hut, telling him how to come home to his mother, who died in the rain the day the god dropped from the sky. However, he could not tell the voices from the sound of the water for long enough, and he floated away too, forever a prisoner.

6

When I wake up, there is no-one to bring melons to me. I am losing the sound of the world & my head is coming to resemble the little god-hut. The dream of my youth comes back to visit sometimes. One thing I am disappointed in is, that since we conducted our experiment and sent away all our canoes, we have become a land-locked people, whose new canoes are not true and straight and sea-worthy.

The Operator

Each volunteer is given sixty hours of training, to do with what he or she wills. In that time, they not only must learn to use their silence judiciously, but also to never give their true name out. Though a natural temptation, this precaution will ensure the anonymity of both the caller and the called.

The Birth of an Idea

the phone rings
the doctor decides
to leave
the call is for the child
there is no one
on the other end.

they unwrap the cord
from the throat

The Waking

exact
on a ridge
of dream
the crest breaks -
a perilous divide
silence on only
one side

eyes closed to preserve
a delicious moment
I cannot know
if I have been
spewed on the beach
or swept back out
to see

further out & deep
throb of engines
at the core of the atom

on land
the shell
of historical
materialism

push: pull:
the universe muscle
throbs

hello?
hello?

Information

light fades
in the lab.
Bell craves
a heart to heart
a chance to confess
& hear confession.
Someone he knows
will never return
from his expedition
into the past.

Watson? Is that you, Watson?

Speaking into the phone
Boston to Washington.
He tries to loop the call,
asks for a repeat.

The creeping dark
brings only static,
an imperfect loneliness
of borrowed lines.

Watson walks out
to meet a future, pulls
the stopper from the dark.

Time runs out.

The Nature of Invention

this too was written
at 4 AM - time of the writing
sweating discourse with dark
awakened from the dream
of full human speech

I know somewhere
Bell is working -
where he wakes in fear
where he claims 4 AM
is his too
by right of discovery
made his in the dream
the silent token of the dream
we're both caught in

I know somewhere a submarine
called the Polaris named
after a star
slides along the ocean bottom
an apple in its launching tubes
past the cable that lies
like an atrophied muscle
from which rise bubbles
through miles of viscous quiet
toward the surface

while I write this
an envelope of sound
slips in silence round
its sun

the phone is ringing
false

Tele-aid

Maybe you can help me - I wanna know a number, but while we're talking maybe you could tell me what to do. I havent eaten in six days since they cut me off welfare because the worker visited my place and said a couch in the alley wasnt good enough and I slept on the couch until it snowed the other night and they came and took the couch away when my cigarette started it burning and none of the hostels or churches around here will take me in any more because well I guess it's my own fault sorta, I kind of get these occasional violent attacks, and they know me, but I dont wanta hurt people, see, and that's what I'm scared of because I feel all this hate inside me, see, and when I drink I fight and the cops said next time they'd take me somewhere and kill me and no one would ever know, and I go up for trial for, well, for trial, and the little girl died, eh, so well, like I guess I'm scared what's going to happen all way around. You know what I mean. Not much to live for, eh, I guess I'd be better off dead. But what I wanted to get was whether you could help me - I need the number for the free tickets to this Tut thing, I hear there's a place that's giving them out free to people like me to go and see it...

Copyright

Dont give me
that line
it's not the statement
that's the problem
(no one told me
there might be an easier way
in the silence
a tao-tone
only the whole man can hear)
but that judgement
is always the outcrop
of undivulged circumstance.

The apparatus worked
that is demonstrable:

this allowed me
by the laws of the country I lived in
to claim prior conception

(sure it had defects
at birth, but it was mine
any word to the contrary
is patent nonsense).

There was too much at stake.

At each stage of my hearing
my mechanism & voluminous notes
vindicated me. What else
are the process
and rules of evidence for?
Investment is to
be profited from.

I converted time and energy
into proof, gave
guesswork and theory
form.

So what if occasionally
the line went
dead?

Ménage à Trois

the phone
is a character
it lies between us
breathing
we warm it with our bodies
it gives nothing
back
but static
but pain
the breath of poison in our ear

its vein
throbs with messages
but will not give them up
it refuses to make
connections
a stone
we cannot squeeze
blood from

it cuts us off
silent
it wants control
to exert its influence
by just being
there

it is between us
a palpable

lie

Dear George Brown

I am writing to you
under my pseudonym
of H.A. Largelamb,
favourite contributor
to Boys Own Annual.

This is an offer -
half the phone
for money
and a certain divestiture
of interest in news
papers.

Be confident in me
and my prowess -
I am like a man in a fog
who is sure of his bearings.
Without your money
I will look elsewhere
and hurry more.
It will take years
of finagling
to use my lines
for transmission of stories.
I am sure you see the merit
of buying into the future.

I have met other men
who work in labs
say they have discovered
economics.

Outside my window
a golden glint
through fog

Proposals

I

human beings be altered
to suit extant
technology.

By insertion
of several gears
into the jaw
& a ratchet in the heart

suffering can be
conquered.

II

mountains be moved
into the ocean.

This way men
can walk
to Europe
over the Atlantic.

All it will take
is time.

III

Give people the means
to talk more.
Fill the world up
with sound,
long-distance calls
and aeroplanes.

They will find themselves
at peace.

A Child's Story: The Answering Machine

1. This is Alex. I never answer the phone personally. I am in right now, just three feet from the phone, but value my privacy. I screen the tape twice a day. If you are not offended, please leave your name, number or message at the sound of the tone.

2. This is Alex. If you speak, you are part of the circuitry of the big machine. Your voice is the participant here. Why are you calling me anyway? If you wish, you know how to talk to the machine. Your intrusion will be taken note of, and possibly reciprocated in the future. I cannot predict when, as this machine has no concept of future.

3. Alex here. There is a good chance the machine will dysfunction and not record your name, number or message at all. It will be as if you never called. Your voice will go to the same place the sound of a tree falling in the forest goes, when I am not there to listen.

4. Alex. Please leave a beep at the end of this message. If you have personal knowledge that this machine has been counterfeiting my voice in order to fulfill some design of its own, write to me at the following beep.

5. Please - this is Alex. I do not own a telephone answering machine. I have had my phone taken out. Whatever this is, it is not me. Do not listen to it. I am very afraid. Things are happening around me that I now begin to understand. My ears are ringing.

The Reply

please
get in touch with me. I went to your house
but there was someone else living there.
Your phone number on the back of the pack
of matches gave me someone else's voice
who wanted to know where I'd got their number.
I couldn't explain. I'm ashamed of the way
I cried into the phone - it's just
that you were there once and aren't there now.

It would be easier to deliver my message
in person, so hard to
tell how the lasso of breath brings me down
hog-tied and panting
on familiar ground.

I want to talk to you,
draw you out through the mouthpiece
and get in touch with what I want
from you, what I've dreamed.

Wrong Number

Inventions spin off forever,
are carried away
to the Patent Office in Washington.

Baldwin returns with pictures
of the front lines. To one side a putteed leg
protruding from an outsize model mousetrap.
It is covered with ants.
I see where I have gone wrong.

What I invent always
abused by others.

All I Did

I fought to mold form
of sound, form
weakest along crest of wave
& invisible content
of the telephonic apparatus
a filial product
a simulated form
for the unspeakable
slithering out of the speaker
not at the source,
but a beginning
nevertheless

found the motion of wave along perpendicular line
creates illusory horizontal progression.

Energy transferred
in pulse

scum and garbage vibrating
nearest the shore of bone.

You are never alone

Silence implodes
& I pull my coarse
wire hair, tear
this bodily insulation
out.

My eyes leak
battery acid.

My tongue lies
heavy with pink living tissue
which says so little.

The Song of the Phone

fill the wires with dreams,
transvalence the metals & relays into other stuff
let the basis of the transmission become liquid,
the aqua mirabilis in which all
dissolves

and let the speaking
always be musical, that is
sounds tripping off the tongue,
dropping and melting into the phone

let the body ring
let there be a song in the wire
of mysterious origin
let possibility multiply

let the formula be subjunctive
transvaluation of all values
multiply the permutations
and chemo-therapeutic properties
of this physical world

it's not too late
to transubstantiate

Nietzsche Returns The Call

What made you think
I was just
horsing around?
The noblest pursuit can end
in a dismount.
I shared much with the men of my time,
much, but no belief
in progress by machined
means.
Gadgetry does exactly nothing
to invalidate the weight of my body
of thought, and less
to extricate a single man
from that lonely return
to the cell of flesh.

It's uphill all the way,
no slick
quick-change artist,
no miracle
labour-saving device
truly alters the unit cost.

They're your bootstraps!

Exceptional men
are reared singly &
not through spectral connection.

Dont call me.
I'll call you.

Bell on Ice at Beinn Bhreagh

The body first felt
sliding away outward
from some abstract centre
subject suddenly to laws
and observation.
A simple experiment in physics
gone sour.

Gravity was always
one of my failings;
the stuff I'm made of,
moving in wind, is
prone to mistakes.

My fingers twitch the sign
for help the body replies
with the sign for
here.

Mabel and Baldwin
tug on my legs,
towel me dry.
I tell them visions
swimming there beneath our feet:
the man in the glass coffin
equipped with a phone
lips rounded:

O, O, O

Tele-aid 2 (from the other pole)

I am going to damage myself. Not because of anything concrete that's wrong but because I am guilty of listening to you for so long and not saying anything worth saying. I absorbed all the poison through a tissue-thin smiling skin & now I'm a boil covered in make-up. I plan to lance myself. What I've said has been said so often, it's pale and white and there's no flavour left. No use the rage spilling out on someone else and burning them. No one's fault but my own. All the little battles won solely on technicalities like the stupidity not to take one's own life.

I never noticed the danger signals - the blank moments when I would close my eyes and cover my ears with my hands and shake like a palsied dog. My eyes would open & stars of white flew like dandruff across the vision & words would mean something remarkable. I never noticed myself running off at the mouth. Everyone's friend.

I dreamed it the other night - a sweating dark fear & the phone my only way out, no dial-tone, only a galactic silence, my voice tumbling through it like a satellite out of control. Aimed toward starry blackness. I asked who was breathing & the voice came back so calm & condescending - there is no one on the other end. There never was. It was a bad dream of connection.

Deus ex machina

she answers you back
quickly, and the voice
is so familiar
midway through her opening statement
you say "but the phone
didn't ring" and she says
"you should not be
afraid" & you know
this form of conversation
should be recorded
& never is
remembered, to which thought
she replies, "two natures
are rounder
than one" &
ball lightning
fills your skull
but you are not listening
for
she is speaking
with your own voice
& you are happy

you wish for a long call &
a clear exchange
some spark
across the gap
& why didn't we do that long ago
the promise to keep in
touch

so vague
about her whereabouts
you wish you were
a South American poet
an antipodean
Nobel laureate

perhaps you are -
she wakes
while you sleep
to write

your antennae quiver
the charge
builds up

your hand trembles
near the receiver

Message Remnant

Reader of lips!
Calculating black
bastard!
Extension
of my self!

I've got your
number - cough up
the heated core
make silence
explode
or I'll put the
finger on you
once and for all!

The storm moves
inside
the hairs
of the inner ear
stand erect

discharge
your responsibility
avatar of tool!

Remove this
distance!

Connect

me!

I demand -

....

Long Distance Call

But do we ever, truly
connect?

All these nights thinking
it was going to happen.
Only after the going
to bed does the feeling come
over me like this.

Both silent
for different reasons.
The assumption that the heart
will fill in what the ear
can't hear.

Somewhere in the dark
you kick the covers off
& the words come in me
they carry you off to dream
my dream of you
& how I love you.

We all dream singly
of a war we do not want
to be in.
I am up late
with the mercenary words.
In the study
there are discoveries
which never reach the bedroom
in time.

Speech & sleep
frozen at 4 A.M.
You are sleeping now
and I am standing
by the telephone.

I pray you
dream of me.
There is no other
door between us.

Magnetic Field

Along the rockset path
last midnight stroll from home to lab:
the metaphor of human ignorance
sparks stream from my fingers
my hair

I will never mend the two cultures
sound & stone I see
floating apart in my lifetime
the inexorable shear
of mind from body

I am only a technician
friction's child
a flare
in darkness

The Toll

I dream I've left
the phone unhooked
upstairs in the lab.
The ocean is pouring in,
starfish drift
through a rift in my head

soft-lipped fish
gather round my nipples

My hands, my back
drenched.

At last, at last
swept away!

Drink lovingly at dawn
from the well again,
wash sweat
from my clammy brow,
scales and muddy
footprints from the floor.

Melly, Edward, Robert,
drowned in their beds.

Navel

in spite of all,
my navel is always HERE. I pick
lint from it. There is a strange smell
to my finger earth.

my navel goes inside my belly,
as the cord went inside my mother
and connected.

I was hooked up to my mother
I phone her NOW
we are hooked up by machine
I feed her reassurance
my life feels good out here
I'm not going
huntry.

this is artificial pap, stuff of bottles,
not milk of breasts, breasts
do not speak in words, but
"the milk of human kindness,"
while my vestigial breasts lie
above my navel
useless and outgrown.

my mother loves me, thats
a wonderful thing
thats her job she
does well

to me
I came
out of her, slid
my hand along the receiver

my finger in the dial
I phone her
this chord is made
human by us
on both ends of a machine
sentiment sieved out
of sentimentality.

I came from her but
the cord is tied off, cut,
and dries
and falls off
and we are alone in
the world:

my miracle was my
mother my
human nail, sharp
cuts to hurt when I dig too hard
to remove the foreign matter that
gathers relentless, I
cry out
for my mother,

who caused me
to be separate
feeding
by nature,
process

she cried out for me,
hurt too,
animal.

the phone connects our houses, Bell
was a man with a belly button, too
who would remember as I
do when I look to see the hole
where we both were
won.

That's our job.

she has a belly button, too, and
we're connected thru time by it, too
as she is I am to others
all mammals with cords
red and blue and temporary, yet
coiling thru time like worms,
which are not mammals,
gnawing the silence
that separates.

I was hers
afterbirth
the ground ate the placenta as
it shall
eat her and me,
and all us mammals who live
in time.

it's funny, I dig my finger into
the hole in my stomach and
the hurt is in my head.

The World Outside

How to relate to fellow
workers in a friendly
but self-confident way,
and how to love -
these I have been bad at.

It was not the loss of the children
nor the young men
who would pick up partway through an experiment
and disappear.
Not even the brothers
whose lungs could not sustain them
through my experiment
in life.

Many of the honours that accrued
were equally hard to bear -
knowing the wretched,
inventive explorers
of their own lack,
would map their lives
on mine - a confirmation
of what they expected to find:
an incapacity.
Proofs arise from a system,
can never confirm it.

Good works in principle.
Bringing the deaf children home
to the flock of speakers
perhaps my best work - I know
I was happiest then,
and not just to hear myself speak
best.
Good is merely a suggestion
of how it worked.

I felt myself skimming
the surface of all human endeavour,
a hydrofoil
over deep, choppy waters:

the first of my kind -
a reasonably gifted technician.
A proto-
type.

So much to prove, I meant
for others to validate
my mechanism, see through
the faults
to the shining core of me
beneath,
the happy child within,
surfacing seldom through
the dark profusion
of messages, the output.

I was a happy man of sorts,
married both in body & in spirit
wedded to the world I lived in,
yet who could never sleep
when others did,
whose sole fear was the falling moon
light, the moon being luna
and seat of lunacy
(I had no time
for mystification,
the proof there
in the word itself)
the moonlight,
falling like sound
on the ears of
the children.

Driving them mad.

Letter to Bell

The line
enters the premises,
promising the world.

It does not ring true.

There are whole rooms
it will not reach,
silent spaces
too lonely to be in.
The outer room
fills with noise, while
knives tyrannize the kitchen's
solitude; the study
is a vacuum.

This is not what was advertised.

I wait
for the divine connection
a share of the prophets.

I want holy secrets
not gossip
about the saints.

Bell's Confession

What possessed me
to do it? The telephone
is a blunt instrument.

Was I mad -
it carries my confession
shot through with false leads,
twisted cords.

My crime and punishment
follow every
where, now a hollow sound,
now a dead ringer
for the truth.

Trickster's gavel, filled
with ocean, common
ground,
my ear lapping up the waves
slapping the prisoner
awake.

I need a repair
never offered.

The sentence is pronounced -

this repeated stabbing
of the tongue.

Every artist
must pay
for his invention.

Curriculum Vitae

taught the deaf / these fragments
 Professor of Vocal Physiology, University of Boston
 the multiple harmonic telegraph unfinished
 the telephone / shored against my ruin
 the Volta Prize
 two dead brothers
 the photophone unfinished
 recording machine the graphophone
 mere improvement over Edison
 the Volta Bureau the Alexander Graham Bell Association
 for the Deaf

Duration of Life and Conditions Associated with
Longevity

bred sheep to calve twice as many possible results
 surgical probe for metal fragments unsuccessful
 suggested radium in glass to treat deep cancer not
 developed in my life

A Proposed Method of Producing Artificial Respiration
by Means of a Vacuum Jacket

two dead sons
 heavier than air flight suggested but not able to
 carry it out

the tetrahedral cell
 millions of dollars
 giant man-carrying kite Cygnet
 eager disciples the Aerial Experiment Association
 Selfridge lost forever first air crash fatality
 the Red Wing seventh to fly
 burned five days later replaced by the White Wing
 White Wing destroyed by accident
 all these years believing
 in a magic lamp
 Silver Dart half a mile elevation 30 feet
 then eight miles in 11 minutes
 dead mother dead father
 financed Canadian Aerodrome Company army had no fore-
 sight no support closed its doors
 down to the sea in ships
 many drowned fishermen
 the hydrofoil boat
 every full moon prevented moonlight falling on Mabel
 and the two girls

most heroic act
device to prevent sailors dying of thirst incomplete
echo sounding incomplete
electrical transmission of thoughts inconclusive
seances inconclusive
multiple other inventions
fabrications
never finished
many thoughts many hopes
not realized
never
finished

The Alphabet Glove

we swim
through the alpha
bet
end shored up
against ruin

from outside sound
seems smooth,
so it could
slip through my grip
like a fish
now I have got my hand in
so to speak, letters
are flesh
bone and tendon
under the surface

now words
tend to catch
in my throat.

my restless hands
speak volumes

Limited Time Response

any
thing
was possible
a magic lamp
could be rubbed
methodically
& all one wished
could be measured & spoken
of
as it tumbled
out.

I learned from
the seances:

never look too close
or you will see the string
that slams the door
the will behind
the writing hand
the accomplice
moving the table
round.

There are no things
but in ideas, one lives
by one's words
and dies.

Processional

It's a human failing, this tendency to die too soon. I've heard the signal pulse from nowhere into strength, only to retreat somewhere unknowable. I have heard the ambiguous cry from lips that know no language, a cry echoing in the birthing room just long enough to blend with the dirge. Mabel and I childless twice. There is no need to wonder why I let others manage my affairs - by distancing the telephone from me, I tried not to enact the curse I gave off like a smell: this man is only able to help at a distance. Best to rush the new birth off somewhere else. The repeated theme of loss and removal: my mother deaf forever at twelve, brothers died young (I had the same disease but lived), and both sons gone shortly after naming. I rushed from project to project, and sired only daughters. New plans for them all burst from me daily - their father, I gained much solace from their possibility, which others would develop. I was best at a distance. As with the lambs I bred on the mountain, which transmitted the code of multiple birthing (a largesse of sheep - this I bequeath to the future) through selective breeding. Safety in numbers - to reduce the attrition. One million dollars in the first two years. A fascination with the longevity of the 8907 members of the Hyde family. All the names and dates and places of my life carefully recorded, noted in volume after volume - the split between home notes and lab notes. This too I bequeath to the future - an inability to see my life as a unity, the connection of experiment at home to the familial resonance in the lab. My whole life as verifiable in its parts as the acceleration of a body falling through space. As measurable as the pitch of a scream rising into a range I could not hear, then falling, falling into silence.

Reversible

Bell, your life
suits me loosely -
a little up in the sleeves
& down in the mouth:

A perfect fit at first,
like a perfect wedding,
bound to stretch
through time;
until the whole cloth
of recorded event
is a memory of shapes
fading, and the struggle
is to transmit
phenomenal findings.

You denied your portliness,
the fat grew
with your reputation.

What you needed was an artist
for a tailor,
aware of the whole
body, the parameters
of movement. An artist
could have concocted form
to your heart's content.

Bodies too
wear out, areas
of stress
with no extra
strength.

There in your shroud,
dressed fit to kill.

A Final Vision

Well, I picked the phone up & instead of the hum that says OK go ahead and dial, there were barnyard noises. I'm a resourceful person, and it only took me a few minutes to disassemble the black box. Inside, instead of coils and wires, there was a tiny & perfect pastoral paradise, glint of sun on tanned thighs, the smell of animal flesh, and the slow grunting of vegetables up through the loam; even the woodsmoke fresh & pure. I marvelled at how this could be. Reverently, I reassembled the casing. Jealously, I guard my secret, knowing someday the right connection will be made, and I will meet you down in there.

For now, I feel a secret happiness at every incongruous noise over & under, behind and around your voice on the phone. When I am in love, I think you might already be there & only waiting for me to smarten up, drop my body like work clothes & let the real me, tiny & perfect & naked, crawl out my ear & down into the receiver, finally arriving in the garden, just as the sun rises.

BLUE HAND POEMS

"Mythopoetic creatures flock
along the streets of our dreams.
They do not mind being monsters.
They are casual about the proof
of their existence,"

Jack Spicer
The Collected Books
of Jack Spicer

The Itch

the dreams rise
like volcanoes

they are erupting
all over my body

the pain ripens like a birth
virus infect me
push me to ecstasy

whirl like a dervish
through the layers
of skin into
clean fresh air

scratch one dreamer

blue '59 mercury

The car is moving up beside us on the new 401 outside Kingston. My father, head turned into the back seat, is screaming I should crash the car and kill us all, I'd be better off. The car is moving our pathetic little family across the face of southeastern Ontario in its bed of limestone, just like all the other heads I see in the cars behind us. I wonder what it is like for them. I wonder what they think of the way our car is weaving as my father turns around. Can they see his face as I do? I imagine that he scares them, or his weaving does. The web of lies and yelling mapped east-west, Kingston to Brockville. Some of those kids in the other cars probably lived in Brockville. I wonder what their fathers are like. I wonder what they will think as they see our car careen off the road and into the jagged limestone walls, and whether we will become fossils someday. There are stains on the fossilized walls that are probably the dried remnants of a kid like me, whose father held to his word.

It is a quiet country back of the highway. They could all be in unimaginable misery, watching from hidden windows, how some cars weave more than others, more than them.

Dear Wallace

dear Wallace
I can bridge the gulf
of cadence
 only in my sleep.

There is no spicer
there, no revocation
of death
to lorca
no connection° to pound
or you.

Only the falls
where it all spills over
into day
and a shoal of monads
struggle up
the stream of talk.

Only your blue hand
risen through my bed
to touch my spine
the dorsal fin
the joke my flesh
is lodged in.

dear Wallace this morning
there is a bone lodged
in my throat, a tear
in the sheet
a hand could come through.

Local Words

told
is content
rigorous obedience

sound
mechanism
& seed money

a dream
of dearth

horrors are local:
local words
local being

Pound warns
(via Jackson)
dont sugar the language

Nietzsche
misunderstands
what stops action

mountain marks
an imperative
each year less
distance
between constants

imagine now:
a field & the cliff
where skin confuses
hot with cold

She

"no matter how justified," she sobs
 "I get tired of you yelling at me,"
 her face wet &
 painful, twist and quiver,
 "if I stay you'll just yell at me"
 and leaves

and I kick the chair she was in,
 hurting my heel,
 & see her walk down the street
 crying and ashamed
 to be crying
 for her emotion

at noon
 alone

& I am alone
 in the silence
 without anyone to say
 I'm sorry to

visions of her alone crying
 cutting wrists or
 dropping out of school
 disregarding her life
 & other images of my wish
 to be the essential one
 without whom
 cut to
 image of me, angry &
 yelling into the face
 no matter how justified

six inches
 from tears

Thesis Proposal

"I am ridiculous," he shouted, and though it took him ten years of relating to come across this relatively minor truth, he was also aware it meant little more than some intellectual rubbie's idolatry of Olson, Beckett and Burroughs.

He tried to extend it: "The world is ridiculous." But this sounded so hollow and contrived that the sentence was scrapped somewhere between the underlying and surface structures.

The poems and stories he should write began to manifest themselves as cysts on his body, and his practice of literary criticism stuck in his craw like a nodule.

"Well, what is this fucking novel for if not to strut my ego & well-defined character?" he demanded, like some outdated beatnik denouncing Hamlet.

His anima took up with another man, and he sat down at the writing-desk to wait for the UFO's to give up their secrets like manna; time makes passes, but fails to drop the bomb.

He lights the pen in his mouth like a fuse.

Savanarola

STOP - "inside my soul"
was what you said.
Disallowed -
it is on inside out.
The stars that swim through our eyes
are evidence.
I examine objects, search chained
books on the shelf
twist the knob
through tv images, even look
into the toaster and
peer into mouthpieces
for saints.

Everything should be
a distinguishable difference.
We all talk on the surface
of a mother planet.
~~We cant look down our nose~~
at this world -
we are plugged
into the soul.

Nihil obstat -
no object
shun.

Technical Bulletin - On Localizing Disturbance

The body is a circuit breaker which, under optimum conditions, performs well.

Yet it has been discovered that in every junction box certain clusters consider themselves mavericks - a cry in the wilderness.

Beware the danger of power surges that should be distributed over the system democratically.

The phone company is no place for idiosyncrasy. There is a direct correlation between social upheaval and poor service.

The disturbance should be isolated as early as possible, preferably during the electrical storm in the individual brain.

Two complementary systems can be interlocked as failsafe, yet produce the worrisome possibility of a phantom shareholder and further disruption.

Loneliness is still the best insulation. A body will only burn so long.

Revenant

On the front door of the Ozymandias Corp
is carved this legend:

NOTHING IS SET IN STONE FOREVER
above it, their symbol: a glacier

Alternative Phone Technology and
Competitive Microelectronics are suspended in air
on the plexiglass coffee-table.

Their 24-hour tape is on
and messages are never returned.

There are rumours in downtown Brantford
that Bell has bought them out.

Mysteriously one day a sheriff's notice
appears on the door.

I despair of their offer
to get in touch with myself
through a state-of-the-art computer-chip loop.

In the Grand Hotel I dream
of shoelaces dangling
from holes in the mouthpiece.

I dial the desk
and get Hiroshima.
The phone book burns
with hidden desires.

It lights up my night.

The Smiths: A History

I

the smiths
neither agglutinate
nor do they spin

at the heart
of a smith
the throbbing muscle
pumps flesh evenly
to all outposts
of the body

no area
is neglected
smiths are egalitarian
creatures

their blood
is free
& not easily
contained

each smith
a brave vessel
sallying forth
into the salubrious
world

the given
lies spread-eagled
before them

the smiths
sit down at the feast

The Smiths: A History

II

each smith
enters his job suspiciously
but ends
exceeding all expectations

each smith
amazes himself
with his capacity
and his aborted fears
of incompetency

there is no
task too large
too tedious
for a smith

the world's labour
a miniature
of the tasks
a smith
feels born
to

Agapé in Bohemia

a man has been struck by the idea
of being hit by a Diaper Queen truck
his mind lies skewed across the northeast corner
of Charity street

this is an action poem

I am a passenger in the fetish streetcar
beside a beautiful woman whose stomach
growls at me in hunger, the driver
is reading Clean Asshole Poems by Corso
or is it Orlovsky himself
it will take an hour to clean up the mess
no it will take six minutes

this poem is going nowhere

the reporter refuses
to let the body of thought be moved
his cameras are not angled
right
he is working against a dead-
line he says
the news is currency
it pays the bills at least
and I wonder why he is calling the story in
one block from the reality newsroom
christ
I can see it from here
just lean over the naked woman in her living
fur coat
she is scratching me down
wards
the police take seven minutes
deciding how to park
their uniformity, their
supper in the back seat

there is nothing the narrative intruder
cannot say

like the man's ghost
gets on the streetcar
without paying -
a form of self-reduction
of fares
he pulls down his pants
for the driver's benefit
both smile

the man without his idea
of being struck
moves back through the car
and I stand up polite
he sits down and pulls the naked woman
into his ideational
lap
it is a bare hug
she mounts
and I slip into my seat
again

the streetcar jumps
forward
we are moving
there is nothing
like life in
Bohemia

Watch For

watch for my friends
they are dangerous
they are writing words
that the power of guards
shall not outlive
etched in hearts the size
of the Stade Olympique

watch for my friends
they write their way into prison
& out again, casting compasses
out the windows
of escape-plan dream-car Volvos
and spinning the wheel
toward something
something abstract
that might be
freedom

my dangerous friends
notebooks cocked &
loaded with volatile language
alien
and armed
to the teeth

Anges du pêche

The typewriter is broken,
it is moving of its own accord
across the page.
I find it is hurling insults at me -
why not type all the time, it challenges,
you dont get the full use out of me,
it declares, I have rights too,
it says it has seen me typing on the sly
with other type
writers.

I cant stand up to that sort of treatment,
so I type out: I'M SORRY
for whatever it is that made you so angry,
how about if we go away together,
just the two of us, somewhere,
and work this out, make it the way it used to be
between us.

I wait for an answer,
but there is only silence;
finally I look under the cover, and there is
a burnt smell,
the typewriter has shorted out.
I wonder what to do, and can think of nothing else,
so I call the hospital,
but the phone wont work,
it keeps crying softly
in some foreign tongue.